



# CASAL: Army Leaders' Perceptions of Army Leaders and Army Leadership Practices

## Special Report 2011-1

June 2011

The purpose of this note is to highlight the key findings from the CASAL survey and provide feedback directly to the survey participants.

During November-December 2010, over 22,000 Regular Army, Army Reserve, and Army National Guard officers (Lieutenant through Colonel), warrant officers (WO to CW5), and noncommissioned officers (Sergeant through Command Sergeant Major) participated in the CAL Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL) Survey.

### Top four findings from CASAL:

**1.** Army leaders are seen as effectively performing full spectrum operations (70%) and demonstrating basic cultural proficiency (68%). However, influencing members of another culture (63%) indicates a potential skill gap for Army Leaders. There is a need for leaders to develop socio-cultural understanding and cross-cultural negotiation skills.

**2.** Key competency strengths (from FM 6-22) of Army leaders are *Gets Results* and *Prepares Self* and attribute strengths are demonstrating *The Army Values* and *Technical Knowledge*. *Develops Others* remains the lowest rated competency. Likewise, *Innovation* and *Interpersonal Tact* remain the least favorable leader attributes and are areas for development.

**3.** Leader development shows considerable room for improvement. In fact, *Develops Others* has been rated the lowest competency since 2006. Overall, only 61% rate their superior as effectively demonstrating this and less than half (48%) of recent graduates think that their most recent course effectively taught this. Additionally, 59% of Army leaders rate their immediate superiors as effective in creating or calling attention to leader development opportunities in their assignment. In 2010, the percentage of leaders reporting that their unit/organization places a high/very high priority on leader development is at an all time low at 46% (compared to 53% in 2009; 55% in 2008). Just over half (57%) of Army leaders believe that they have time to carry out the duties and responsibilities for developing their subordinates, down from 63% in 2009. Finally, only 30% report that Army leaders in their unit/organization develop the leadership skills of their subordinates to a large or great extent

**4.** The presence of toxic leaders in the force may create a self-perpetuating cycle with harmful and long-lasting effects on morale, productivity, and retention of quality personnel. Surprisingly, toxic leaders accomplish their goals (66%) to a greater extent than constructive leaders (64%). Additionally, half (50%) of subordinates of a leader who does things and behaves in a way that is positive for the organization and themselves, but negative for subordinates (i.e., toxic leader) expect that leader to achieve a higher level of leadership responsibility, and 18% say they emulate that (toxic) superior.

*Quality of Leadership and Contribution of Actions and Character to Leadership:* Overall, the quality of leadership is seen as favorable (68%). The percentage of Army leaders rating their subordinates and peers as effective is similar for non-deployed (79% and 75% respectively) and deployed (79% and 72% respectively). For the most part, Army leaders are seen as effectively demonstrating the leader attributes (79%) and they effectively demonstrate the core leader competencies (71%). The Leadership Requirements Model (FM 6-22) defines the core competencies and attributes of a leader. Between (73% and 83%) of Army leaders rate their immediate superior as effective or very effective across all leader attributes, however, *Innovation* and *Interpersonal Tact* have been consistently rated the least favorable leader attributes and are areas for development.

*Effects of Climate and Situational Factors on Leadership:* Most leaders are confident that the unit can perform its mission; that honest mistakes are not held against individual leaders; and that leaders are effective in establishing and enforcing an ethical climate (70-77%). There is moderate confidence that unit members demonstrate resilience, that a superior can be trusted in life or death situations, the overall satisfaction and morale level, and that leaders effectively handle stress from workload (66-69%). A concerning finding is that only 48% agree that one's unit does *not* waste time and energy on unproductive tasks. Generally speaking, the nature of the work is not at issue; and overall, leaders see their units as effective. In fact, 60% of leaders think that their unit outperforms similar units; and most (80%) believe that their knowledge, skills, and abilities are suited for the challenges of their work. The main issue in this area has to do with how the average leader sees the Army as a whole, and individual unit methods. Additionally, regarding their unit, respondents report that: seeking help for stress-related problems is accepted and encouraged (56%), leaders in their unit or organization help Soldiers handle combat stress (61%), the frank or free flow discussion of ideas is encouraged (59%), they felt informed of decisions that affect their work responsibilities (54%), the organization implements the good ideas suggested by subordinates (50%), and when solving a problem, unit members identify actual root causes as opposed to applying a quick fix (49%).

*MSAF:* A little over 2,800 Army leaders who participated in CASAL also had participated in Multisource Assessment and Feedback Army-360 (MSAF). About 60% report sharing their feedback with at least one other person as compared to the 97% of Army civilians. Eighty-nine percent of participants note at least a small effect of participation (72% moderate or greater impact) and 36% think the effect lasted longer than a year. Perceived improvement to self-awareness, readiness to learn, general leadership, and coaching and mission effectiveness ranged from 43% to 53%, which indicates significant gains in leadership capability.

*Toxic Leadership:* Estimates from the data suggest that about 1 in 5 Army leaders are seen negatively by their subordinates, and most (83%) believe that they have interacted with toxic leaders. Only 11% feel that the problem is not severe. Toxic behaviors include micromanaging, being mean-spirited/aggressive, rigidity and poor decision making, and having a poor attitude and setting a bad example. Additionally, 22% are seen as not putting unit needs ahead of their own, 25% are seen as a “real jerk” and 21% agree that honest mistakes are held against them. There is no indication that the toxic leadership issue will correct itself. Unfortunately, feedback such as reduced individual productivity/effectiveness, confrontation, or hearing it from others is not occurring. This is not to say that there are not good leaders or even outstanding leaders too. While 83% said that they directly observed a toxic leader last year, 97% also observed an exceptional leader.

*Morale and Satisfaction and Intention to Remain in the Army:* Most Army Leaders report that they are satisfied (79%), but only half say that their level of morale is high or very high (52%). The deployed leaders reporting high or very high morale has increased in Iraq (+7%) but decreased in Afghanistan (-4%) as compared to 2009 findings. Of all Army leaders not currently eligible for retirement, two-thirds in the active component (66%) and three-fourths in the reserve component (78%) plan to stay in the Army until they are eligible for retirement or beyond 20 years (steady since 2005). The increase in the percentage of active duty captains who intend to remain in the Army until retirement observed in 2009 has held steady in 2010 at 47%. While commitment to the Army has been consistently strong, many Soldiers feel that this commitment is not reciprocated. Forty-one percent of Army leaders agree (an additional 28% neutral) that, “The Army no longer demonstrates that it is committed to me as much as it expects me to be committed.”

*Quality of Leader Development:* Operational experience (83%) and the effectiveness of Army leader development practices, programs, and policies (75%), and self development (74%) are seen as strongly impacting leader development. However, development at the unit level is lacking. For example, 63% agree that Army leaders effectively develop subordinates leadership skills (63%) and that leaders effectively groomed for the next leadership rank or position (61%). A little over half respondents (55%) indicate that operational experiences are utilized for developing leaders and slightly less (52%) indicate that there is support for leader development at the unit level. For the past 3 years, over 80% of Army leaders have consistently rated the operational experience and self development domains as effectively preparing them to assume new levels of leadership or greater responsibility. Respondents (65%) agree that their organization *expects* them to engage in self development; while only 40% agree that their organization *makes time* for self development and just 40% of leaders indicate that their unit’s leader development has had an impact on their development.

*Institutional Education:* As compared to favorability ratings in the 80-85% for the other two leader development domains, institutional education appears considerably less favorable at 58% (9% increase from 2009). Some of the perceived weaknesses include: too few (about 50%) company grade officers and Jr NCOs believe that they had sufficient opportunities to attend courses or schools, and too many Jr NCOs (40%) indicate that they attended their most recent course too late in their career. While about two-thirds of graduates think that they are effective at applying what was learned, less than one-half (48%) indicate that their unit or organization is effective at utilizing or supporting the leadership skills they learned. Generally, while attendance is viewed as beneficial (71%), and the majority of individual leaders (67%) think that they are effective at applying what was learned, only about half of AC leaders (52%) agree that instruction from Army institutional education has provided a foundation that helps them get more learning out of everyday experiences such as garrison and deployment operations. Even though the quality of instructors was high (80% favorability, 5% increase from 2009), only a slim majority (51%) thought that the course actually improved their leadership capabilities, and not even half believed that they were better prepared to influence others in their unit (49%), nor better prepared develop their subordinates (48%). Senior leaders surveyed about what skills were lacking in recent graduates commonly responded: appropriate critical thinking and problem solving skills. Students who found their course ineffective were also surveyed about potential improvements and they suggested: improving course content by having focused instruction specific to leadership including basic leadership skills, hands on experience, and specific leadership issues such as developing others and mentoring, update content to be relevant and match current operational settings.

Summary: The research team would like to thank our hard working Soldiers for their excellent response and timely feedback to this important survey. Our goal is to report your valued feedback. Senior leaders- including the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army are aware of your feedback and are working to improve the shortcomings identified by this survey. It is important to know that your feedback is taken seriously, that it has been reported, and that it is being used to improve our organizations.

#### References

- Riley R., Hatfield, J., Nicely, K., & Keller-Glaze, H., & Steele J.P. (2011). *2010 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL): Main Findings*
- Steele J.P. (2011). *2010 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL): Executive Summary*
- Department of the Army. (2006) *Field Manual 6-22, Army Leadership: Competent, confident, and agile (FM 6-22)* Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army.